Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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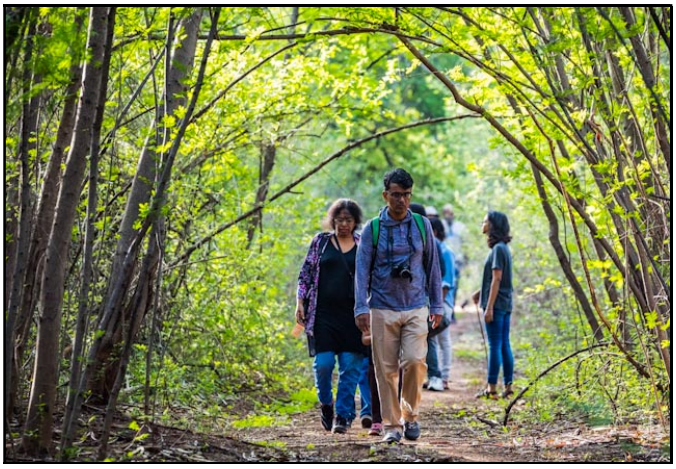
FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 16th September 2018, 6.45AM: Mrugavani Deer Park, Chilkur. Meeting Point: Punjagutta Cross-roads, 6.00AM

Chilkur is located around 25km from the city and is home to a lot of woodland birds. Keep a lookout for the Asian Paradise-flycatcher and other scrub forest birds. The Blue-faced Malkoha and the Pied Crested Cuckoo are also usually seen here.

This will be a half-day trip. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

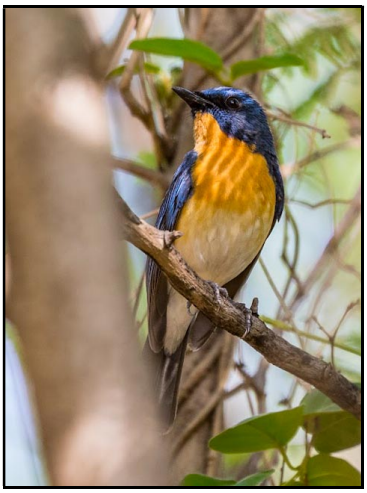
EARLY MORNING WITH BIRDS AND NATURE
Trip Report: Hyderabad Central University, June 24, 2018

Text: Amit Garg; Photos: GV Prasad



The weekend was finally approaching, after a tedious week of long working hours that felt like a month! To give myself a refreshing break, I was looking out for a fun activity to spend my weekend fruitfully, when I happened to bump into my colleague, Bharadwaj Sir, who asked me to come along for birdwatching that Sunday. Even though I am a novice at birdwatching, I still agreed.

Birdwatching, as the name suggests, is an activity of observing birds in their habitat, which could be either wild/natural sites, or even landscaped locations – since birds are there everywhere. Originally a pastime, it is increasingly becoming popular among old and young. However, spotting and identifying birds require experience, knowledge and a pair of binoculars, all of which I lacked.



Tickell's Blue Flycatcher

Early Sunday morning, I took off with a 20-strong group of BSAP (Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh) members. We reached our destination, the University of Hyderabad, around 6:30AM. The university is notable not only for winning accolades on an academic front – it is also recognised for its huge campus area spread over 2,300 acres of land and containing a wide variety of Flora and Fauna.

Common Leopard

We started moving around inside the campus, spotting birds here and there – I simply followed my colleague who is a birdwatching aficionado. He was, of course, properly equipped for the excursion with a pair of binoculars and a DSLR.

Oriental Magpie Robin

Red-vented Bulbul

Cotton Stainer Bug

I came across different birds which I could barely recognise. But in layman's language if I were to describe a specific bird that I noticed, I'd go for the one with a white mark on its chest. It was beautiful to see how these little creatures are so different from each other and beautiful in their own way. Those few hours spent in that beautiful environment with the fresh breeze, lush green parks and trees, a small water body, was enough to fill me with joy and rejuvenate me for the coming weeks.

Shikra

Green Bee-eater

Indian Robin Male (L) and Female (R)

Scaly-breasted Munia

Baya Weaver

Grasshopper

Pied Bushchat

Red-rumped Swallow

River Tern, Spot-billed Duck, Darter, Bronze-winged Jacana

Bronze-winged Jacana

Grey Heron

Little Grebe

It might take some time and proper guidance for someone to become a trained birdwatcher. However, therein lies the beauty of the journey to your destination and I will enjoy being a part of it.

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WEEKEND IN BANNERGHATTA

Text: Surekha Aitabathula; Photos: Dr Jayati Mitra

Just a hop, skip and jump from Bengaluru, and you will fall straight into the lap of nature, away from the hustle bustle of serpentine vehicular traffic. The lap in question belongs to the Bannerghatta National Park (BNP) which is a beautiful lung space right in the middle of an urban labyrinth. Declared a National Park in 1974, Bannerghatta encompasses 13 Reserve Forests, covering an area of 260 sq km. Tucked into the northern-most tip of Eastern Ghats in Karnataka, BNP is contiguous in the Southeast with the North Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary.

BNP is the last large surviving scrub forest, that supports an annual population of 100 to 150 Asian Elephants, apart from photographic records of a Tiger, Dholes, Sloth Bears, Leopards and Honey Badger which were reported in 2015. BNP is home to 128 species of identified trees, prominent amongst which are Red Ebony, Axlewood, Red Cedar, Ixora, Mountain Spike Thorn, Male Bamboo and Thorny Bamboo.

Tickell's Flowerpecker

And when you have trees you obviously have arboreal inhabitants too! Yes, there are over 222 species of resident and migrant birds including Painted Stork, Sirkeer Malkoha, Black-winged Kite, Jerdon's Leafbird and Blue-bearded Bee-eater.

On the flip side, of course, since BNP is linear in shape with a notably long boundary of 285 km, it faces very high anthropogenic pressures on its fringes leading to increased incidence of human-wildlife conflict. Around 130 settlements abound within five kms of the protected area boundary.

Common Sailor

The BNP Biological Park is enclosed by the BNP and covers an area of 7.32 km in the BN Wildlife Range of BNP. The Biological Park was carved out from the BNP in the early 1970s as a children's park and was brought under the Zoo Authority of Karnataka in 2001. BBP currently contains 32 species of mammals, 44 species of birds and 15 species of reptiles in Zoo exhibits and the Safari.

Small Grass Yellow

The Butterfly Park was very interesting. Built to create awareness and for conservation and breeding, the BBP has a butterfly breeding centre too attached to the main butterfly park. The butterfly park is a circular structure with a high dome that allows enough space for thousands of butterflies to fly around. The dome is completely covered with polyhydrocarbon sheets. The perforated inverted pots hanging overhead from the dome ceiling diffuse the echo and thereby prevent the noise created by the visiting public from reflecting back. I must say it also adds to the beauty of the dome ceiling.

Apefly

The park was full of Blue Mormons, Common Castors, Red Pierrots, Common Crows and many other butterflies. This is the best place to watch and learn about the life cycle of a butterfly.

Pale Grass Blue

Pea Blue

Common Crow

With that ended our short and sweet sojourn in Bannerghatta. As I reflect back on the trip, I realise that the state of Karnataka is very green, including the much-urbanised capital city, Bengaluru. What a blessing it is to live in a bustling city that is not really a certified concrete jungle!

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Trip Report: Wayanad Hills, May 2018

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

A view of Wayanad Hills

The Ela Blooms Resort near Kalladi in Wayanad district of Kerala is an old Cardamom farm tucked deep inside the Western Ghats at an elevation of 4612 feet. It was in the month of May that we visited this place on the advice of a fellow birder. The Jeep driver, who took us up the hill from Kalladi on a rugged 4km track winding through thick forest terrain, enquired the purpose of our visit. When we told him that we were birders he said that there were not many birds up there. As he chatted on through the bumpy ride we could only focus on holding on to the jeep lest we fall off! It was indeed an adventurous start to our birding.

As we approached Ela Blooms at about 4.00PM we were welcomed by the chirping of some black-coloured bulbuls. On closer examination we found them to be Square-tailed Bulbuls – a lifer for us. After a hot cup of tea and snacks at the modestly done resort, we walked around to sight some birds before the light faded. The cloud-capped hills, the dense green vegetation of the Western Ghats, the distant Shola grasslands and the wild forest flowers around the resort were enchanting.

Square-tailed Bulbul

Greater Flameback

We spotted a Greater Flameback, an Oriental White-eye, a White-cheeked Barbet and a Malabar Giant Squirrel. There was one deep owl-like call that went 'who…who…who' in the background. We thought it could be the Langur or Mottled Wood Owl but it turned out to be the call of the Nilgiri Wood Pigeon.

Nilgiri Flycatcher

Just as we were winding up for the day, we saw the resident Nilgiri Flycatcher on a cable right in front of us. This too was a lifer for us. We could not get any good photos though.

As we settled into a couple of chairs in front of a solar lamp, the caretaker's dog too sat down by our side as if to guard us. By now we were exhausted and beginning to feel the effects of the jeep ride. After a quick dinner we retired for the day.

The next morning it drizzled for an hour or so but after that there was bright sunlight. We explored the area around the resort, all the while keeping track of landmarks so as not to get lost in the wilderness.

As the first rays of the sun streamed through the misty landscape we saw a pair of Nilgiri Flycatchers. One of them was holding a red berry in its beak while the other was making sallies like a typical flycatcher to catch insects before returning to its perch. This time we clicked some very good pictures and filmed a video.

Yellow-browed Bulbul

A little further down the hill we sighted a pair of Yellow-browed Bulbuls. Yet another lifer! With a host of calls to be identified it was indeed getting more and more exciting and the activity kept us on our toes.

Before we realized it was an hour past noon and we had to rush back for lunch. It was all the way delicious Kerala cuisine that we savoured during our stay. In God's own country it was like heaven on Earth. We rested only briefly and continued our trek downhill because our plan was to cover the Shola grasslands along with a guide.

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

It was a nice trek through the dense forest. The birds were less active now. After nearly an hour of walking we came to a path along a meandering canal. Here we saw some more Yellow-browed Bulbuls. A Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher entertained us as we rested on a rock. We could see a Common Kingfisher making quick dives into the water to catch some fish. At this point we decided to drive to the Shola grasslands to try and spot Grassbirds. After a half an hour drive, we got out to trek up a very steep hill. Half way up we had to give up as the footholds were getting slippery. We tried to sight some Grassbirds from where we were but could not. We got back to Ela Blooms just in time for tea.

It was now time to leave as the Jeep driver had to be relieved before it was too dark. In half an hour we landed on the road. Our guide served us hot *Ulli vada* and a full glass of tea to go with it. As we ate and drank, we saw the beautiful Malabar Whistling Thrush perched on a branch by the side of the nearby stream and a pair of Southern Hill Mynas atop a tall tree. It was a memorable birding trip with seven lifers and a checklist of 38 fabulous species.

The full list of birds is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	20	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
2	Nilgiri Wood Pigeon	*Columba elphinstonii*	21	Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	*Culicicapa ceylonensis*
3	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	22	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
4	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	23	Square-tailed Bulbul	*Hypsipetes ganeesa*
5	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	24	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
6	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*	25	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
7	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	26	Oriental White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
8	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*	27	Dark-fronted Babbler	*Rhopocichla atriceps*
9	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	28	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
10	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*	29	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
11	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*	30	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
12	Coppersmith Barbet	*Megalaima haemacephala*	31	Nilgiri Flycatcher	*Eumyias albicaudatus*
13	White-cheeked Barbet	*Megalaima viridis*	32	Malabar Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus horsfieldii*
14	Greater Flameback	*Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus*	33	Southern Hill Myna	*Gracula indica*
15	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*	34	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
16	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	35	Crimson-backed Sunbird	*Leptocoma minima*
17	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	36	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
18	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	*Dicrurus paradiseus*	37	Long-billed (or Loten's) Sunbird	*Cinnyris lotenius*
19	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	38	Little Spiderhunter	*Arachnothera longirostra*

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*)

Alexandrine Parakeet (Bairluti, Andhra Pradesh, October 22, 2016)
(**Photo: Sudhir Moorti**)

Order: Psittaciformes
Family: Psittaculidae
Genus: *Psittacula*
Species: *P. eupatria*
Size: 56-72 cm

Description & distribution: The Alexandrine Parakeet is one of the larger members of the Psittacidae family. It is named after Alexander the Great, who is said to have carried many birds from Punjab to various parts of Europe and the Mediterranean. It was first described in 1760 by French zoologist Mathurin Jacques Brisson as *Psittaca gingi* after the south-eastern Indian town of Gingee. Later, in 1766, Carl Linnaeus re-described it as *Psittacus eupatria*.

Predominantly green, the male Alexandrine Parakeet has a light blue-grey sheen on its cheeks and nape, a very heavy red bill with yellow tips, bright red shoulder-patches and yellow-green underparts. The tail is yellow on the underside, while the upperside is green at the top, melding into blue and then to yellow at the tips. Additionally, the adult male has a black stripe across the lower cheek, and a pink band on the nape, both of which are missing in the adult female. Young birds resemble the female, except that the tails are shorter.

The nominate sub-species *P. e. eupatria* is seen in Western and Southern India, and in Sri Lanka. *P. e. nipalensis,* also known as the Large Indian Parakeet, is seen in Afghanistan, Pakistan, North, Central and Eastern India, Nepal and Bhutan. *P. e. avensis,* or the Large Burmese Parakeet, is seen in north-east India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The Large Andaman Parakeet *P. e. magnirostris* is seen in the Andamans and the Coco Islands. Both *P. e. avensis* and *P. e. magnirostris* have a blue band on the nape. *P. e. siamensis*, although known as the Thai Rose-ringed Parakeet, is considered a sub-species of the Alexandrine Parakeet and is seen in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, and has a blue wash on the back of the head and neck.

Habitat & behaviour: The Alexandrine Parakeet is generally seen in small flocks in forests, woodlands, mangrove forests and agricultural lands, although the groups may be larger where there is adequate food or in communal roosts. The calls are deeper and harsher than those of the Rose-ringed Parakeet, and vary from a ringing *trrrieuw* to a loud *kree-aar* or *keeak*, a deep *klak-klak-klak-klak* and a resonant *gr-aak*. It calls loudly and harshly when alarmed or while mobbing predators. Large flocks also may sometimes call excitedly together. As with the Rose-ringed Parakeet, the Alexandrine Parakeet also is known to mimic human speech in captivity.

Nesting: The Alexandrine Parakeet breeds mainly between November and April. Nesting is usually in natural tree hollows, although it may occasionally use cracks in buildings, or holes excavated by itself in trees. The usual clutch consists of 2-4 blunt oval-shaped white eggs.

Local name: The Alexandrine Parakeet is known as *'Rai tota'* or *'Hiraman tota'* in Hindi, '*Pedda chiluka*' or *'Mandi rama chiluka'* in Telugu and *'Periya kili'* in Tamil.

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